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ABSTRACT

The existence of extrasensory perception (ESP) among volunteer college students was investigated in numerous studies, under hypnotic and non-hypnotic conditions. Study results indicate that: (1) some types of suggestions administered in a hypnotic context appear to facilitate extrasensory perception; (2) strong ESP suggestions administered without a formal hypnotic induction procedure also increase the level of scoring, but to a lesser degree than when administered to hypnotized subjects; (3) depth of hypnosis appears to be unrelated to the success of the hypnotic suggestions for improved ESP performance; and (4) it is unclear whether hypnosis alone results in a higher level of ESP performance. (Author/HLM)

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Hypnosis as a Tool in Parapsychological Research*

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Ever since Mesmer, there have been assertions, demonstrations, and experiments pointing to presumed causal associations between what we now call hypnosis and what we now call psi (the ability underlying ESP, psychokinesis, and the other phenomena studied by parapsychologists). Sometimes psi has served as the independent variable, as in the instances--chiefly during the 18th and 19th Centuries--of so-called hypnosis-at-a-distance, in which the hypnotist allegedly used thought transference to induce a trance in a subject located some distance away. More frequently, it has been the other way around, with hypnosis serving as the independent variable, apparently creating or at least eliciting supernormal perceptual abilities.

Why have the two fields, hypnosis and parapsychology, been so often intertwined? Cynics might answer that the shared history simply reflects the fact that both fields have attracted more than their share of fools, frauds, and crackpots. But the overlapping histories of the two fields also suggest an underlying area of congruence, the exploration of which may eventually shed light on the inner workings of both psi and hypnosis. I do not believe it is mere coincidence that the characteristics that seem to distinguish the high from the low ESP scorer are precisely those that have been reported to characterize the deeper hypnotic subjects: openness to new experiences, acceptance of the validity of the phenomena in question, and ability to achieve a relaxed, passive state.

Despite some unsuccessful attempts by early investigators to bring psi under control by means of hypnosis, a number of more recent studies have yielded more encouraging results. In the comments that follow, I shall be referring primarily

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to my own program of research. It should be made clear, however, that several other parapsychologists have also been engaged in experiments involving hypnosis. (For reviews of these, see Honorton and Krippner, 1969; and Van de Castle, 1969.) My own work has been based on the assumption that if anyone has psi, then everyone does. According to this view, psi is a quite expectable characteristic of normal human beings, rather than a special gift discernible in relatively few persons. Thus, if it exists at all it is more like hearing than like absolute pitch. Why, then, do most people fail to demonstrate extrasensory or psychokinetic powers? I suggest that the answer lies in the fact that large segments of our society scorn, or repudiate, any phenomenon that appears to depart from popular notions of what is physically possible, with the result that we acquire what might be called mental blocks, inhibiting the expression of our latent capacities. It occurred to me that hypnosis, so successful in eliminating math blocks, spelling blocks, sexual blocks, etc., might also be a useful tool for the elimination of psi blocks. Specifically, if the individual can be relieved of the fear of ridicule, fear of the unknown, and unwillingness to experience that which is defined as impossible, his/her previously latent ESP and PK abilities will manifest themselves.

My general approach has been to give standard ESP tests to volunteer subjects—mostly college students—under normal non-hypnotic conditions and under various types of hypnotic conditions, all counterbalanced to control for order effects. Hypnotic suggestions that ESP does exist, that the subject possesses ESP, and that the subject expects and desires to be successful in the ESP test about to be conducted have resulted in increased ESP scores for most subjects. The increases, although far from spectacular, have been of sufficient magnitude to achieve respectable levels of statistical significance. These research efforts were not intended to provide definitive evidence for the existence of ESP. Nevertheless, <u>something</u> improved following and presumably resulting from the experimental manipulations.

Whether we wish to call this something "ESP," or "psi," or "zilch," we have an effect here that is not readily explicable in terms of existing knowledge concerning normal perceptual processes.

In addition to using the basic research design that I have just described, I have been exploring a number of other ways of utilizing hypnosis in parapsychological research. These may be briefly summarized as follows. In a testing situation involving a "sender" and a "receiver," the performance level achieved when both participants were hypnotized was higher, on the average, than when both participants were in the waking state. In another experiment, the temporary creation--via hypnosis--of an intense emotional bond between sender and receiver was not successful in elevating ESP scores. Returning to the single-subject format, I achieved considerable success by permitting the individual subjects to generate their own sets of suggestions designed to increase ESP functioning. Another experiment indicated that subjects who are made to believe that a high ESP score will increase the happiness of a close friend or relative tend to show increased scoring levels, whereas subjects who are made to believe that a high ESP score will render the close friend safe from imminent danger are unlikely to show an increased scoring level. Most recently, I found that the basic set of hypnotic suggestions, described above, is more effective in eliciting higher-than-baseline ESP scores than are bribes (offered to hypnotized subjects) involving the promise of $100 for very high levels of success.

Putting these and other findings together, one emerges with certain tentative generalizations--really hypotheses to be tested in future studies. First, the right kinds of suggestions, administered in a hypnotic context, appear to facilitate extrasensory perception. General pro-ESP suggestions are effective across subjects, but it does seem that specific, individualized suggestions can be even more effective. A logical next step is to devise a preliminary procedure--perhaps

an interview or a standardized inventory—that would enable the investigator to determine the specific suggestions to use with each subject.

The second generalization is that strongly worded pro-ESP suggestions, administered without a formal hypnotic induction procedure, also increase the level of scoring, but to a lesser degree than do the same suggestions when administered to hypnotized subjects. If this finding can be confirmed, it would somewhat weaken the contention by Barber (1969) and others that formal induction procedures are unnecessary for the production of so-called hypnotic phenomena.

Third, depth of hypnosis appears to be unrelated to the success of the hypnotic suggestions for improved ESP performance. It seems that subjects are more receptive, or less resistant, to suggestions of this kind than to suggestions for the elimination of smoking, overeating, or other bad habits. This is a particularly interesting finding which, if confirmed, has the practical implication that large numbers of individuals, unselected with respect to ability to enter deep levels of hypnosis, can be readily helped to utilize their psi potentialities.

I would like to be able to offer a fourth generalization, but I cannot. Does hypnosis, all by itself, without pro-ESP suggestions, result in a higher level of ESP performance? Some of my findings—as well as those of others—suggest yes; but some findings suggest no. If the ultimate answer turns out to be an affirmative one, we would have a very satisfying continuity with other findings suggesting that altered states of consciousness, deep relaxation, right-hemisphere activation, sub-cortical levels of functioning, temporary conditions of regression, and perceptual monotony, constitute psi-conducive states. On the other hand, if it should turn out that hypnosis per se is not a variable of importance but is significant only as a medium for the transmission of suggestions, then it might be appropriate to reconsider some of the aforementioned psi-conducive states in terms of demand characteristics, the placebo effect, the Hawthorne effect, the Rosenthal

effect, self-fulfilling prophecies, and the other forms of pollution that make it so complicated to be a behavioral scientist these days. These considerations give rise to a rather basic question. Have hypnosis and psi been going together for so many years because they are somehow causally related, or because they are both, in a sense, epiphenomena of the same set of mental or neurophysiological conditions?

In any case, hypnosis has been, for me, a useful tool. Is it the best conceivable means for eliciting psi? Very possibly not. Can it be helpful in adding to our understanding of the conditions favorable and unfavorable to psi success? Probably yes. Will it bring us closer to parapsychology's Holy Grail, the replicable experiment? Time, and further research, will tell.

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